Best Practices in Reading and Writing

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In our world of education, there are many approaches to learning. Education is constantly changing, and there are various ways of teaching reading, writing, mathematics, science, social studies, and even the arts. There are many various ways to teach, and educators are constantly trying to find practices that are beneficial for students in the classroom. Reading and writing is one of the most basic, yet important subjects in school and children learn to read and write at such a young age. Reading is used throughout an individual’s life, so it is important to teach students reading strategies effectively in order for them to become successful. There are many approaches to reading and writing, but the phonics approach seems to be very successful in this generation of teaching.

The phonics approach emphasizes that reading instruction should focus on phonics and basic rules for translating written symbols into sounds” (Santrock 2011). The phonics approach seems to be very beneficial to the modern style of teaching. The phonics approach allows children to understand which each symbol represents, and they also learn to put a sound to the letter. This helps students begin to piece together words by using their knowledge of each sound the symbol represents. This is a great approach because students can learn to read words that they may not be able to read in their grade level by using the whole-language approach. The whole language approach is where reading instruction should be equal to the child’s natural learning of language. Reading material is given to students in its complete form, and students learn reading by decoding the word as a whole. Readers are taught to recognize whole words in sentences rather than to break each word down into sounds. Though both approaches are successful in their own ways, phonics approach seems to break it down very well for students.

Learning to read phonetically also carries out into writing. Phonetic teaching helps students not only to sound out words on their own, but to also spell out words on their own by using their knowledge of sound structure, and eventually transfer that into writing. Though phonetic spelling may not always give students correct spelling the first time, it is still a great way to teach because through writing, students are able to get their message across. Learning the different spelling rules of the English language will come later on in school as an easy fix. According to Mayer, decoding words is a key component to cognitive learning and the process of reading. The phonetics approach allows students to decode symbols and transfer those into sounds, which helps them learn how to read. The goal in teaching children how to read is to get them to think about how they are doing things, and learn to problem solve and work things out on their own. They learn metacognitively, which is also involved in the reading process. “Good readers develop control of their own reading skills and understand how reading words (Williams & Atkins, 2010)” (Santrock 2011).

To deepen reading skills, summarizing what students are reading is an important aspect to the reading process. The Transactional Strategy Instruction approach is a cognitive approach that helps students understand reading, and be able to summarize it as well. This approach helps students break down what it is they are reading, and be able to retell those key details of a particular text.

Another approach to best practices involves learning to understand text, and to be able to use prior learned strategies to read difficult or tricky words. In the “Strategic Teaching and Strategic Learning in First Grade Classrooms” article, it uses an approach called the Reading Express, which helps students use strategies about reading they learn to understand the text they are reading.

Through whole group instruction, teachers begin to ask the class to look at pictures of books and try to explain what the story is about before they read the actual words. This is a great approach because it teaches children to make observations and create predictions. They are trying to figure out what it is they are learning about before they actually read the words that will tell them what the story is about. “The underlying goal of Reading Express is to provide for all first-grade children support in learning strategies that will enable them to become independent, strategic, self-monitoring readers” ((Dean, Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill 1999).

When readers come to a tricky word, they are taught to take a step back and think about what is going on in the story. They are encouraged to look at pictures to help them figure out the word, and try to re read the word. Another strategy is breaking the word down and trying to sound it out in bits of the word instead of the word as a whole. After they pronounce the word, they ask themselves if the word sounds correct. This approach is great because it teaches children to be responsible for their learning, and they begin to think about what they are reading about. This helps students become independent readers. “The key to the Reading Express Program was that children become intentional in their use of strategies during reading connected text,” (Dean, Kinnucan-Welsch, Magill 1999). The goal in this type of reading approach is for children to use prior reading strategies they have learned and actually apply it to their reading, especially when it becomes difficult for them to decode words.

The Reading Express strategy approach can easily go hand in hand with the phonetics approach in reading. It is great because the phonetics approach helps students learn that basic foundation of reading and decoding words, while the reading express helps children work through tough words, and also to understand what the text is about rather to read words without putting meaning to it.

The whole goal in teaching reading is for children to read words fluently, and comprehend what it is they are reading. The phonics approach teaches children to break each symbol down in the word, and pronounce it the way they learn each symbol. Through phonetics, children are pushing themselves to try to sound out different words, and they begin to think about what they are reading. Being able to decode words is important, and this also carries over to writing. Teachers cannot constantly spell out every word in a sentence for children, let alone every single child in the classroom. Phonetic spelling is a great way for children to get their thoughts down on paper, and they feel good about accomplishing their tasks. Students should also be able to learn how to understand what it is they are reading, and our goal as teachers is to help students grow into independent readers. Through these approaches of strategies, students can become great learners, and feel good about their reading, writing, and overall comprehension skills.

References

Kinnucan-Welsch, K., Magill, D., & Dean M. (1999). Strategic Teaching and Strategic Learning in First-Grade Classrooms. *Reading Horizons.* 40(1), 3-21.

Santrock, J. (2011). *Educational Psychology, 5th Edition.* New York, NY. McGraw-Hill.